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ABSTRACT

This ERIC digest discusses ways of effectively banning smoking in schools so that controversies do not continue after implementation of the policy. By advocating a process approach, the document cites steps taken by the Lake Forest School Board to prohibit smoking in and around school grounds. Step one involved committee planning involving representatives from all the smoking and nonsmoking adult school publics. Step two involved feedback from groups potentially affected by a smoke-free schools policy. A trial balloon or run to test the policy's effectiveness comprised step three. Step four was a survey of smoker and nonsmoker attitudes toward the new policy. Step five involved official policy implementation through school board approval. In addition, this article reviews successfully implemented antismoking legislation in public places and in schools and lists the medical risks involved in continued smoking in public places and in schools. (JAM)

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Updating SCHOOL BOARD POLICIES

Volume 20/Number 7/July-August 1989

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During the past five years a nationwide furor has altered the way our society views cigarettes. Each new surgeon general's report describing the medical risks of smoking or inhaling tobacco smoke intensifies the debate over banning smoking in public places, including transportation, restaurants, government buildings, and schools. The common response to a whiff of smoke once was, "I don't care." Today the smoker often hears, "I wish you wouldn't" or "Please don't."

Schoolhouse door

In October 1988—after nearly two years of committee work, community feedback, and evaluation—the Lake Forest School Board adopted a policy, the implementation of which significantly reduced smoking in schools and, at the same time, attempted to recognize the right of personal choice.

For years a policy had prohibited smoking by Lake Forest students:

> The use of tobacco in any form is prohibited on school grounds, within school buildings, or on school buses during the student school day. Subsequent offenses and violations of this policy will result in administrative action according to district policy. The use of tobacco in any form will be discouraged in all schools through an educational program of instruction regarding the effects of the use of tobacco as recommended by the State Department of Public Instruction.

The policy worked well. Tobacco use was rare among the 3,200 students. But no policy governed smoking by school staff or visitors.

Time for change

In the fall of 1986, nonsmoking staff members started to complain. Their concerns ranged from the annoyance of smelling smoke on clothes to the long-term health problems resulting from inhaling second-hand and side-stream smoke.

Some employee restrooms were a problem. "We smelled like we had been in a pool hall if only one person smoked," said one unhappy teacher. The presence of smoke discouraged nonsmokers from using the faculty rooms; buildings with dozens of teachers had relatively empty lounges. Soon Board members anticipated lawsuits by nonsmokers worried about contracting respiratory diseases and cancer.

Although staff raised the issue of smoke-free schools, students, too, influenced the Board's policy development. Young people in all areas of the state criticized the "double standard" of a proposed state board of education initiative to ban smoking by students (but not staff). Local students similarly objected to the current Lake Forest policy. A smoke-free schools policy, however, would solve the problem.

Process approach

As the only school system in Delaware considering such a significant policy change and conscious of the potential controversy of a ban, the Board decided on a new policy development approach. Usually a policy analysis committee composed of teachers and administrators first reviews a proposal. Then the community has a chance to comment after public readings at two consecutive Board meetings. Finally the Board considers the policy for adoption.

But a policy on smoke-free schools required a more elaborate policy process, one allowing for extensive feedback and a trial run. The Board appointed a special committee to collect information, to survey the staff, and to make a policy recommendation. After review, the Board would "try out" the committee 'proposal as a six-month probationary policy. Staff would closely monitor implementation (keeping an accurate count of violations) and again would survey employees. Only then would the Board consider the policy for final adoption.

Step one: committee work

The Board began the process by careful selection of the committee. The 17 members included representatives of all employee groups, smokers and nonsmokers, and even leaders of the teacher union. The committee's broad base and unhurried timetable helped the committee to iron out differences *before* further policy development.

Another advantage was the sense of *ownership* of the final policy. Board members wanted the policy to have grassroots support with employees making significant contributions to development rather than the Board or superintendent imposing mandates. The composition of the committee dashed any employee concern that the group would "rubber stamp" an administration proposal.

As committee work began, several issues quickly surfaced. Supporters of a smoking ban advanced four reasons:

- **The age of the buildings made smoking a fire hazard.**
- **School officials shouldn't condone an unhealthy habit.**
- **Nonsmokers shouldn't be exposed to secondary or sidestream smoke. (Exhaled smoke is more toxic than smoke inhaled by the smoker.)**
- **A double standard exists unless the Board prohibits smoking by staff.**

Committee members opposing a ban offered two arguments:

- **Schools should protect the personal rights of employees.**
- **Smoking is a "working condition" and, as a negotiable item in the union contract, must be bargained in order to be changed.**

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Communication

Feedback from groups potentially affected by a smoke-free schools policy proved to be a crucial part of the policy process. To accomplish this goal, the superintendent and School Board asked the users of school facilities (staff, students, parents, and community groups) for comments. By paying special attention to the policy *process*, the Board hoped the policy *product* could be molded in a way that promoted both effective implementation and exemplary policy goals.

The School Board kept the school community and staff informed through memoranda, letters, and press releases. In each message the Board repeated the call for input. And input was received. However, despite the emotions that surfaced during discussion, groups neither circulated petitions nor organized demonstrations.

Because of the potential controversy the press enthusiastically participated in the communications effort. Reporters conscientiously covered Board meetings and kept tabs on committee progress. In fact, regular publicity of the *policy* and the *policy process* proved to be an asset. Reporters "got" their stories; the Board "got" a free and effective communications vehicle to the public. In fact, both the news articles and editorials in the daily and weekly papers described the proposed Lake Forest smoke-free schools policy as a "model" program.

Trial balloon

After 18 months of discussion and debate, the committee made a recommendation: Prohibit smoking by *all* staff members, employees, visitors, and guests in all school *buildings*, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. (Both the recommended and adopted policies are included in the administrator's copy of *Updating*.)

After consultation with the school attorney, the Board approved the recommendation on a six-month trial basis. The Board then would review the policy for final adoption.

The policy had to have teeth. This one did: any employee violating the policy three times would be dismissed. During the probationary period, only two guests at a junior high activity and one employee violated the policy.

The trial run was also a time for an intense public relations campaign. In addition to widespread publicity of the policy provisions, the Board offered the American Cancer Society's "Smoke-Enders" program to all interested employees. And, unexpectedly, smokers—determined to break the habit but who worried about gaining weight—swelled the ranks of the wellness program. In several schools, employees started walking groups.

Survey: the second time

The second staff survey (please see the administrator's copy of *Updating*) produced a high response rate with 75 percent of the forms returned. Expressing appreciation for the opportunity to respond, employees also confirmed the benefits of a give-and-take process and the emerging sense of policy "ownership."

Board members reviewed the surveys. According to supporters of a ban, "The high school faculty lounge went from the worst in the state, in terms of smoking, to the best .... I feel much less irritable at work .... I don't feel like I work in a pool hall .... My eyes don't burn .... I don't worry about long-term health problems anymore."

Opponents commented, "I used to smoke in private; now my students know I smoke [Under the new policy, employees who felt they must smoke had to go outside the building] .... This is another attempt by the administration to strip me of my rights .... I should have the choice to smoke; it's my life .... This is against the union contract."

Back to the Board

After reviewing the survey, the administrative report on the policy implementation, and data from the Tobacco Institute, American Lung Association, American Cancer Society, and American Heart Association, the Board adopted a modified version of the policy. The only change involved the designation of areas of the school buildings for staff smoking.

Board members agreed, the compromise sanctioned a "win-win" situation.

- **The Board resolved a sensitive issue without controversy.**
- **The sense of employee "ownership" had led to effective policy implementation: No violations had occurred since its adoption.**
- **The Board took an important step on the road to smoke-free schools.**
- **Policy development sparked a new level of communication among the community, staff, and School Board—one that the Board hopes to apply to other policy areas as well.**

Employees are better off, too. The policy has encouraged a number of employees to quit smoking; among those who continue, now some smoke less. More staff participate in school and community programs designed to cure tobacco addiction. Finally, employee lounges and restrooms are smoke free and no longer are sources of irritation.

Does anyone ever smoke in Lake Forest Schools?—Almost never! ■

National trend

- In the spring of 1989, Senator Bill Bradley (D-NJ) introduced an amendment to the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act of 1986 that would include information on the dangers of tobacco in drug education programs. Says Bradley, "Since the vast majority of people [nine of ten] who smoke started as children, and since tobacco is a gateway for alcohol and drug abuse, efforts must be undertaken to dissuade young people from ever using tobacco."
- Forty-four states so far have passed laws limiting smoking in public places. More than one-half of the nation's companies either restrict employee smoking to designated areas, prohibit smoking entirely, or make no-smoking or the pledge to quit a condition of employment.
- Recently the National Cancer Advisory Board urged Congress to pass legislation :making tobacco a drug to be regulated by the Federal Drug Administration, an action the Board said would "intensify the pressure and activity in America to eliminate smoking and tobacco use ...."

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Smoke-Free Schools: A Progress Report

According to the 1989 follow-up report, school boards—in increasing numbers—are placing tougher restrictions on smoking by students, employees, and visitors. Consider the trend:

- **Today 95 percent (up from 87 percent in 1986) of all U.S. school systems have written policies and regulations limiting the use of tobacco products.**
- **Among schools with restrictions, 17 percent are smoke-free; they ban smoking by students, staff, and visitors—24 hours a day, seven days a week—in schools, on grounds, and in administrative buildings.**
- **Among school districts with policies restricting (but not prohibiting) smoking, 13 percent expect to ban the practice in the future.**

School officials report higher rates of compliance with no-smoking policies than was the case three years ago. The number of "excellent" marks given to student compliance increased from 33 to 48 percent. Eighty-seven percent of those surveyed indicated either excellent or good employee compliance.
Of particular note: compliance in both categories was substantially greater in "smoke-free schools" than in schools allowing smoking in restricted areas.

With most schools having restricted or banned student smoking in the past few years, policy change now affects mostly school employees and adult visitors. Citing reasons of health, the importance of appropriate adult role models, and local or state "clean indoor air" or no-smoking laws, school boards are taking action.

- **In 1986 only 15 percent of schools banned employee smoking in buildings; in 1989 the number almost tripled to 40 percent.**
- **Three years ago 12 percent of schools prohibited smoking on school grounds; today 25 percent.**
- **In 1986 about 4 percent of schools prohibited employee smoking at off-campus activities; today 22 percent.**

NSBA has joined forces with the "Tobacco-Free Young America by the Year 2000" coalition to achieve the goal of graduating a smoke-free class by the turn of the century. According to the resolution adopted by the 1988 NSBA Delegate Assembly: "All local school boards should adopt a local policy which prohibits the use of tobacco by students, staff, and others in school district buildings."

The "Tobacco-Free Young America Project" offers a variety of resources to help school boards provide an education program to complement a smoke-free schools policy. School systems achieving this status are eligible to receive a commendation packet that includes two recognition certificates, promotional ideas, a fact sheet, and decal. For more information contact your state school boards association or Tobacco-Free Young America by the Year 2000 at 1029 Vermont Ave. N.W., Suite 710, Washington, D.C., 20005 or telephone 202/628-0277. Copies of the brochure *Smoke-Free Schools: A Progress Report* ($3) and *No Smoking: A Board Member's Guide to Nonsmoking Policies in the Schools* ($3.50/list, $2.50/Direct Affiliate) are available from NSBA's Publications Department.

- On the legal front, federal courts so far have not upheld the constitutional "right" of an individual either to smoke or to work in a smoke-free environment. Some employee unions contend smoking is a "term and condition of employment" and as such should be discussed at the bargaining as well as the board table.

Medical risks

- According to the U.S. Surgeon General's 1989 report on smoking and health, 40 million Americans have stopped smoking—or nearly half of all living U.S. adults who ever smoked have quit since 1964—saving or prolonging 189,000 lives. Nonetheless, smoking continues to be a major cause of death and disability, accounting for 390,000 or one of every six deaths in the U.S. in 1985. Other alarming signs: each year hundreds of thousands of people take up the habit and children start to smoke at younger and younger ages, which increases their risk of dying from smoking-related disease.
- "Passive smoking" (inhaling exhaled smoke) and "side-stream smoke" (smoke from the burning end of a cigarette), according to a 1988 Environmental Protection Agency study, accounts for 85 percent of environmental smoke and could cause as many as 5,000 deaths a year among nonsmokers age 35 or older.
- A study of 1,000 persons addicted to cigarettes, drugs, and alcohol (*Journal of the American Medical Association*, Feb. 1989) reported that nicotine is more addictive than either hard drugs or alcohol. In terms of prevention programs, some schools fail to take tobacco addiction as seriously as drug and alcohol abuse, says Joseph Tye, coordinator of Stop Teenage Addiction to Tobacco.

An expensive habit

Financial reasons might provide additional incentives for school boards, as employers, to ban smoking and encourage employees to quit the habit. Employees who smoke "cost" more than nonsmokers because of higher rates of absenteeism, medical claims, and disability retirement. The American Heart Association estimates the annual costs to be as much as $93 billion due to disease treatment, lost worker productivity, and related expenses.

Tobacco- (not only smoke-) free schools

The National Cancer Advisory Board advises school boards to ban all tobacco products, not only traditional and "smokeless" cigarettes, in no-smoking policies. The use of chewing tobacco and snuff has increased, especially among teenage boys who are influenced by athletes consuming these products during sports events or on television ads. The Smokeless Tobacco Council has undertaken a national campaign advising youths to wait until they are 18 years old before making a decision on tobacco use. ■

Policy tips

A sound and workable tobacco-free schools policy usually includes the following: *why* the policy is adopted (educational and community values, medical evidence, and state or municipal law); *who* is affected; *what* products and activities are prohibited; *where* the ban applies; *how* and *when* the policy will be implemented; penalties for violations; available resources to help employees quit the habit; a health education program; a monitoring system; and a communication plan to publicize the policy in the schools and community.